

OLD TRAVOIS TRAILS

Tongue River
Number

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER, 1940
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OLD TRAVOIS TRAILS

A Magazine Devoted to the Study of Indians and the West

Published bi-monthly at the restored portion of old Fort Philip Kearny,
Banner, Wyoming, by Charles D. Schreibeis

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Volume I

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER, 1940

Number 3

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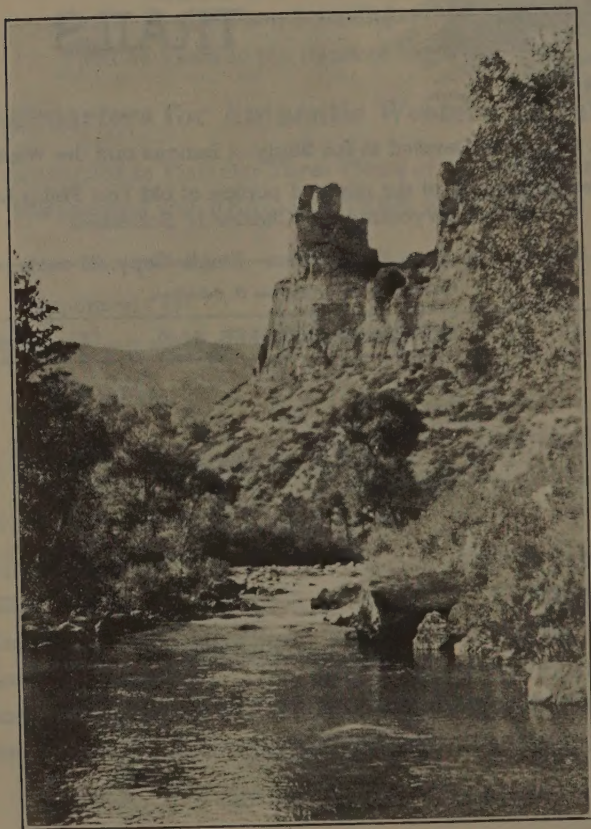


Photo by Charles D. Schreibeis

CASTLE ROCK IN TONGUE RIVER CANYON

The "Sibley Scout"

By CHARLES J. OVIATT

This beautiful country nestling in the eastern foothills of the Big Horn Mountains is rich in Indian history, lore and legend. Its natural beauty and the abundance of fish and game attracted both the Indian and the white man in the early days and it was only a matter of time until serious disputes would arise for possession of the country.

The thrilling stories of Fetterman's massacre, the Wagon Box fight, Connor's battle, the Battle on the Rosebud, the siege of Ft. Phil. Kearny and Custer battle on the Little Horn are well known, and historians and poets have done much to keep alive the memories of those conflicts.

And this is as it should be for we of this generation and they of generations yet to follow should know of the sacrifices suffered by the pioneers in order that we might have this beautiful and bountiful country in which to build our homes and live our peaceful lives.

Unknown Trip

There is, however, one thrilling scouting trip and incidental skirmish battle which is not so well known. Apparently but little has been written about it and only recently has general attention been called to it. The material for the account below has been drawn from many sources—too many, in fact, to easily give

credit but these sources seem reliable and hence we believe that the thrilling story of the "Sibley Scout" is about as follows:

The Battle of the Rosebud had been fought only a short time previously (the sounds of Custer's battle had hardly died away) when that great Indian fighter, General Crook, decided to get full information as to the strength of the enemy in this territory.

Crook's command was camped on Little Goose creek, only a short distance from the site of the present city of Sheridan.

In order to get this desired information he detailed Lieut. Frederick W. Sibley, a fine young officer, and a small command to proceed on a scouting trip along the foothills of the Big Horns into what is now Montana. Sibley took with him a small detail of cavalry, a newspaperman by the name of Finnerty, two very fine scouts, Frank Grouard and Baptiste Pourier, and John Becker, a mule packer who had had some experience as a guide.

Camp On Big Goose

According to the report of Finnerty, they started in the late afternoon and probably crossed over what is now the Sheridan municipal airport and then camped somewhere near the old Jenkins ranch on Big Goose creek.

Sibley and his scouts knew that many small parties of warring In-

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dians were between Big Goose creek and the Little Big Horn river so decided to travel under cover of darkness as much as possible. Accordingly, as soon as it was dark, this little band started out and travelled all night along the foothills toward Tongue river.

Many signs were seen to indicate that parties of both Sioux and Cheyennes were in the vicinity but no actual encounter with them was made.

With the two scouts in the lead, the little party pushed forward as fast as possible and, on the morning of July 7th, they reached a point of prominence just this side of the Little Big Horn river. Scout Grouard now far ahead, suddenly signalled for the party to stop. He then cautiously crawled to the top of the hill to observe the country beyond.

What he saw from that point of vantage sent him hastily back to Lieut. Sibley with the report that Chief Sitting Bull with his full war party was in temporary camp only a few hundred yards away and undoubtedly his Indian scouts would soon discover the presence of Sibley's small party. In fact, even as Grouard spoke, there appeared on hill tops to north and east, Indian scouts in full war paint.

Sibley Retreats

Lieut. Sibley had great faith in the judgment of his two scouts and he ordered a speedy retreat back into the foothills between the Little Big Horn and Tongue river. Strangely enough, they apparently were not actually seen, but

Frank Grouard, from a position in the rear of the retreating detail, saw one of the Indian scouts pick up the trail which was, of course, fresh and easy to follow.

With bloodcurdling shouts and war chants, the Indian warriors, under Sitting Bull, started in full pursuit. Sibley took time only to warn his men that they must fight to the death if overtaken as immediate death was preferable to the treatment usually meted out by these Cheyenne and Sioux warriors.

With all possible speed the little party retreated up and into the mountains and crossed what was probably one of the main forks of Tongue river—the exact location apparently is unknown. After several hours of terrific but orderly flight, Sibley and his scouts decided that the Indians had given up the chase and a halt was made to rest the tired men and horses.

"Indians!"

At the end of an hour, there was a sudden and excited shout of "Indians" from the picket to the east. The little party again went into full retreat and stopped in the edge of larger timber for the fight which apparently could not be avoided.

The horses were tied farther back into the timber and the soldiers took their places behind large rocks and trees for what they firmly believed to be their last fight with Indians or any other foe. For an hour or more the battle raged in sharp-shooter fashion with apparently but few direct hits.

Scout Grouard recognized the white buckskin clothes of Chief

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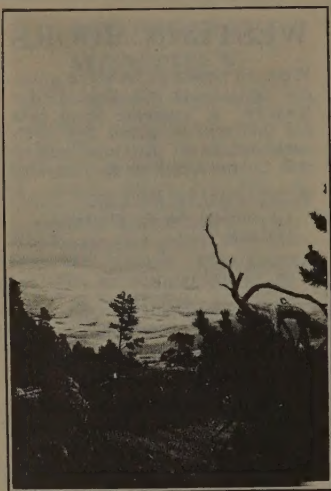
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White Antelope of the Cheyennes who, apparently in charge now, was urging his warriors to move forward and end the battle. Sibley's men were ordered to concentrate their fire on White Antelope with the result that he soon fell mortally wounded.

With their chief out of direct leadership, the Indians fell back for a short time but later came forward with renewed fury, determined to avenge their leader's death.

Scouts Grouard and Pourier both advised Sibley to retreat as the small detail could not hold out long even if General Crook could be advised of their position and danger. With Sibley and one scout remaining in the rear, the men were ordered to leave their horses and retreat. Quietly they slipped away with the two remaining men firing to keep up the appearance of battle.

Retreat Again

Sibley was the last to leave the battle ground while Gruard led the retreat on foot. He knew that "Indians are as lazy on foot as they are active on horseback" and that the only hope lay in retreating where no horse could penetrate. Accordingly, he led them through tangled underbrush and over fallen timber and up mountain sides too steep for any horse.

It was later believed that the retreat had been in progress nearly an hour before the Indians realized that fact. But here was a party fully fifty miles from Crook's camp, utterly exhausted and without food or horses. They had but

little ammunition left and were so tired that the average soldier cared little what happened next.

With a pack of howling warriors eager to avenge the death of a favorite war chief directly on their trail, the outlook was dark and dreary. But undaunted Sibley and those brilliant scouts led the weary band further into the mountain fastnesses.

Even though they now seemed to have eluded the main party, they were fully aware that they would probably meet other and fresh warring parties along the foothills en route to Crook's camp but they pushed on without rest.

Trail Unknown

The exact trail may never be known but it is generally conceded that they crossed Wolf creek about one and one half miles above the main buildings of the famous Eaton Brothers ranch to the west of Sheridan. Then they proceeded over the divide to Soldier creek valley.

About midnight they stopped on a small hilltop to rest briefly and there experienced a terrific hail and wind storm.

It suddenly grew very cold and the soldiers with torn clothing, no blankets and in weakened condition suffered greatly. Details of their retreat are almost too horrible to relate. The determined scouts insisted that to rest further would mean certain death and so the party pushed on.

At about 2:00 a. m. and just when safety seemed a possibility, the leading scout dropped flat on his face and motioned for the

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others to do likewise. From these positions, they saw on a ridge a few hundred yards to the north at least a hundred Sioux warriors pass by. They expected that these Indians would cross their trail a short distance in the rear and return to attack. But a kind Providence ruled otherwise and the warring party passed out of sight.

Again Sibley's party had seen death stalk by! Had these Indians found the fresh trail it is probable that all the whites would have been killed because they could have offered but little resistance and some of them had ceased to care much what happened.

After a brief rest, they pushed on through the night across the divide between Soldier and Big Goose creeks and about daybreak crossed the latter creek by wading the cold water to the armpits. Two of the soldiers were so worn out that they refused to try to cross and "flopped" on the northern bank regardless of any danger that might be in store for them.

Meet Crook's Cavalry

The rest of the party dragged on. It took them four hours to travel six miles and they were barely moving at all when they were accidentally discovered by a detachment of cavalry from Crook's camp.

Extra horses and wagons were sent for and eventually the party reached camp without loss of life after some of the most harrowing experiences known to the warfare of any time or place!

Scouts Grouard and Pourier were given full credit for their ability

and bravery, and Lieut. Sibley was officially commended for accepting and following their advice during the entire trip. Without such brilliant leadership, it is probable that all would have perished and history would have recorded another massacre in the "winning of the west."

Birth of Sibley Lake

In 1936, largely through the efforts of the Scenic Development Committee of the Sheridan Chamber of Commerce and with full co-operation and approval of the U. S. Forest Service, a CCC project was set up and approved to build a dam on Prune Creek on U. S. Highway No. 14 above Dayton and thus create a new lake in the bed of that creek. This work is now completed and a beautiful lake borders the highway just west of the Cutler Divide. It covers about forty acres with a maximum depth of twenty feet. Nestling, as it does, at the foot of pine-clad slopes and bordered on one side by a fine highway, this lake is a thing of beauty even in a land of beauty.

This new charm of the Big Horn Mountains is officially and popularly known as "SIBLEY LAKE." Its location so close to the "SIBLEY TRAIL" makes the name very appropriate and it is a very fitting and permanent monument to the memory of those rugged pioneer soldiers who, led by Lieut. Sibley and his wise and brave scouts, risked their lives a thousand times on this one scouting expedition in

(Continued on page 22)

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OUR VISITORS

By RUTH SCHREIBEIS

The largest single group to visit the restored portion of old Fort Philip Kearny this summer was a party of fifty-eight Christian Endeavor members of the Presbyterian Church. The delegates represented various Christian Endeavor organizations throughout Wyoming, and included guests from Nebraska and New York.

The party was organized at the Presbyterian Camp at Story, Wyoming, by Mr. Charles Oviatt of Sheridan, who directed a tour of historical landmarks in this section of the country. At the Fort the members gathered around the old saw-mill frame and heard the stories of interesting characters and thrilling adventures on this frontier.

The above picture was taken in front of the replica of one of the officer's quarters by Rev. Stanley T. Evans of Basin, Wyoming.

Tongue River Indian Fight

By DON RUSSELL

From Winners of the West

Perhaps the largest expedition against Indians ever undertaken by volunteer troops was that of Brig. Gen. Patrick Edward Connor in the summer of 1865 following a series of outrages by Sioux, Arapahoes, Cheyennes and other tribes of the plains.

Connor, a veteran of the Mexican War, entered the volunteer service in 1861 as colonel of the 3d California Volunteer Infantry, which was assigned to guard the Overland Trail through Utah Territory. Colonel Connor was assigned to command the District of Utah, and establish headquarters at Camp Douglas, Salt Lake City. In 1863 he led a successful expedition against hostile Shoshones on Bear River, 140 miles north of Salt Lake. In 1865 he was promoted brigadier general and assigned to command the larger District of the Plains.

The Powder River expedition was organized in four columns, and some 3,000 men were involved. The right was under Colonel Nelson Cole of the 2d Missouri Light Artillery, with eight companies of his regiment equipped as cavalry, except for one section manning three-inch rifled guns, and eight companies of the 12th Missouri Cavalry. This column started from Omaha, following the Platte River past Fort Kearney, Neb., then striking

north through the Bad Lands to the Black Hills. It did not join Connor until near the close of the campaign.

The center column, under Lt. Colonel Samuel Walker of the 16th Kansas Cavalry, moved northwestward to join Colonel Cole north of the Black Hills.

The left column, commanded by Colonel James H. Kidd of the 6th Michigan Cavalry, with six companies from his regiment, was accompanied by Gen. Connor. Its other organizations were Company E of the 7th Iowa Cavalry, which regiment also furnished an artillery detachment, Companies E and K of the 11th Ohio Cavalry, Signal Corps and Quartermaster detachments, and the very famous Company A. Pawnee Scouts, commanded by Maj. Frank North. Maj. North, after notable service with the Pawnee Scouts on the plains, became for a time associated with the first Wild West shows in the days of Buffalo Bill, and was very much a national hero. Also with the expedition was the famous scout Jim Bridger, one of the great figures of Western histories, well remembered, even at the present day, for his "tall stories" of Yellowstone Park. At this period he was masquerading under the more sonorous title of Maj. James Bridger.

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ADLYN M. KEFFER, Editor

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The fourth column, under Capt. Albert Brown, consisting of Companies L and M of the 2d California Cavalry and a company of Winnebago and Omaha scouts, left Fort Laramie with Gen. Connor and Colonel Kidd, but diverged to cross the Platte River Bridge, where Lt. Caspar Collins had been killed in a fight with Indians a few weeks before. Brown's troops then marched down the Wind River Canyon, which is one of the little-noted beauty spots of Wyoming, where the road between Casper and Cody winds on a ledge between high cliffs. Curiously, the Wind River, for apparently no reason, at the hot springs now known as Thermopolis, becomes the Big Horn River.

* * *

Connor struck the Bozeman trail August 14 and there established a post at first called Fort Connor, but later more famous as Fort Reno. On August 16 Maj. North's scouts overtook a band of Indians, believed among those who had killed Lt. Caspar Collins at Platte Ridge Bridge, and killed all of them—24, according to the most conservative accounts. Camp was made on the Piney Fork of the Powder River August 25, where later was established the famous Fort Phil. Kearny, near the present site of Buffalo, Wyo.

Maj. North's scouts, on August 29, discovered "a large mesa, or tableland, all covered with Indian ponies" and an Arapaho village of Black Bear and old David.

Gen. Connor took the lead, rode his horse up the steep bank of the ravine, and dashed out. "The general watched the movements of his men until he saw the last men emerge into line," in the words of a diarist quoted by Maj. Fred B. Rogers in "Soldiers of the Overland," the only complete account of this expedition, published last year by the Grabhorn Press of San Francisco. "The whole line then fired a volley from their carbines into the village without halting their horses, and the bugles sounded the charge. . . . We already saw that we were outnumbered, and that only desperate fighting would save our scalps. . . . Many of the female portion of this band did as brave fighting as their savage lords. Unfortunately for the women and children, our men had no time to direct their aim. . . . There was not much of the military in our movements; each man seemed an army by himself."

But most of the Indians succeeded in getting away, closely pursued up Wolf Creek by Gen. Connor and a part of his command, while the Pawnees were busy in rounding up the horses. After a 10-mile chase the general found he had out-distanced all except 14 of his soldiers, at which point the Indians turned on him and forced him back, although fortunately he was reinforced by the stragglers and was able to keep up a running fight back to the camp. There 250 lodges were destroyed and 500 horses rounded up. Gen. Connor esti-

(Continued on page 22)

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Nature's Mysterious Cavern

By FLORAMAE CROGHAN

Midway between the summit and the base of a rugged and tediously accessible cliff, in the Tongue River Canyon of the Big Horn Mountains, looms a large, black opening in the face of the



Courtesy of Tom Kessinger,
Frans Osterwald

Stalactites in Tongue River Cave

stone. This is the door to the most mysterious phenomenon of nature in the vicinity of northern Wyoming. Named "Crystal Cave" by its discoverers, this cavern has been the subject of much con-

templation for many years, and, at the present time, its mysteries have not yet been revealed.

I sometimes think of Crystal Cave as a kind of inheritance, since my grandfather, Mr. Henry Croghan, was the first to explore its interior and to tunnel it so as to permit others to marvel at one of nature's masterpieces. I have been instilled with the desire to discover for myself the source of the river which flows through the cave; the blind wall or the opening which would mark the discontinuity of this underground passage; and the source of the constant supply of fresh air.

Deep within the dark and damp interior of Crystal Cave is a so-called Crystal Room in which gorgeous specimens of crystalized rock are to be found. These specimens hang from the ceiling of the cave and also lie in layers on its floor. Many homes in this vicinity of the Big Horn Mountains have a piece of crystal as a novelty door stop.

Near the crystal room and equally as interesting is the Butcher's Room in which nature has shaped red stone into grotesque formation resembling slabs of bacon and hams.

Crystal Cave, in the summer, is an attraction which draws many tourists to Tongue River Canyon. It is dangerous, yet thrilling, to

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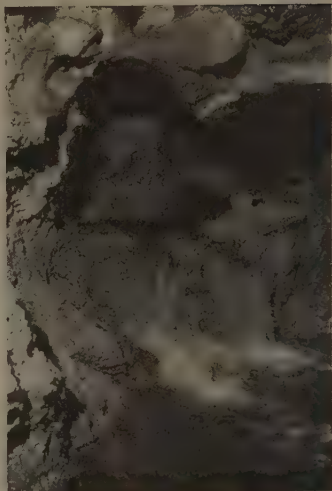
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Buffalo, Wyoming



Courtesy of Tom Kessinger,
Frank Osterwald

"Hidden Falls" in Tongue River Cave

walk on a thin layer of stone and hear a misplaced pebble falling down and down, hitting the sides of rocks, growing gradually fainter, and finally fading into nothingness. The atmosphere, too, is cold, and one must be dressed accordingly. The explorer should be well supplied with carbide lamps or flash lights, for a misstep on a slippery rock may easily result in darkness.

For an entertaining and thrilling afternoon, may I suggest that you visit Crystal Cave? Such a marvelous exploit of nature cannot be disappointing.

The Indian Paint Brush

By A. V. HUDSON

A strange little flower
With a sun-kissed nose,
Without any perfume,
Yet red as a rose.

Did some Indian maiden
Plant you here
In the footprint left
By the hoof of a deer,

Or are you a symbol
Of blood that was shed
In the feud of the white man
And the red?





Courtesy of Thomas Stevie

Elk Herds of the Big Horns

By THOMAS STEVIE

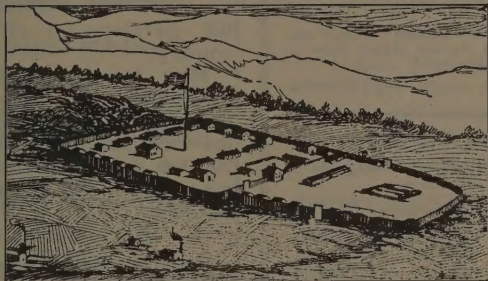
Has anyone ever asked you, "Where did the elk herds of the Big Horn Mountains originate?"

It is exceedingly interesting to know that this credit should be given to the immediate vicinity of Dayton, Wyoming, and not to the Rod and Gun Club as is commonly believed. A contribution from the ranchers in this locality made possible the importation of the elk into the Big Horns.

These contributions resulted in a herd of seventy-one calves being shipped into Ranchester by train from the Jackson Hole country in January, 1911. In order to be assured of the survival of the

elk, they were distributed on three ranches to be fed for the winter. Thirty-one were placed on the Pete Stephenson ranch; twenty on the Rudston ranch, now the Horseshoe ranch; and twenty on the Eaton ranch. During the ensuing winter, five of the elk died.

In May, 1912, the elk herd, now more fully matured, was freed. An attempt to drive them to the mouth of the Tongue River Canyon proved quite successful and the efforts of the ranchers in the surrounding country are well repaid by the fairly abundant herds of elk in the Big Horn Mountains at the present time.



Courtesy of Dale C. Wilhelm

FORT PHILIP KEARNY

On July 15, 1866, Fort Philip Kearny was established on a prominent position near the forks of the Pineys, as a head quarters post of the Rocky Mountain District, on the old Bozeman Road. The site was selected by Colonel Henry B. Carrington because of its strategic military advantage near the pass over Lodge Trail Ridge. This ridge is the watershed between the headwaters of the Powder River and Tongue River basins.

On December 21, 1866, the Fetterman disaster occurred just beyond the pass at Lodge Trail Ridge. Here eighty-one brave men and officers were ambushed by the Sioux and Cheyenne Indians. There were no survivors.

On December 21-25, 1866, John (Portugee) Phillips made his memorable ride from this fort to Fort Laramie to bring news of the Fetterman disaster.

On August 2, 1867, the Wagon Box Fight was fought near the Pinery, at the foot of the Big Horn Mountains. Thirty-two men successfully repulsed a hoard of Red Cloud's warriors from behind fourteen ordinary wagon boxes.

On August 20, 1868, Fort Philip Kearny was abandoned by the troops, and it was immediately destroyed by fire.

On October 17-18, 1888, one hundred and eleven bodies were disinterred at the old military cemetery at the foot of Pilot Hill, and removed to the Custer Battlefield National Cemetery in Montana.

Through the efforts of the Scenic Development Committee of the Sheridan Chamber of Commerce, and in full co-operation with the United States Forest Service, a CCC project was set up and approved to restore a portion of the site of old Fort Philip Kearny. This project included a stockade and a replica of one of the old officer's quarters for a custodian. Within this area today are a few of the charred foundations of several of the old post buildings.

In the vicinity of the old fort one can still find evidences of the block house on the summit of Sullivan Hill, the lookout point at the top of Pilot Hill, and the site of the old military cemetery nestled at the foot of this proud sentinel. Appropriate monuments have been placed on Massacre Hill and the site of the Wagon Box Fight to commemorate the heroic deeds of the brave soldiers who fought and died on this old frontier.

A more recently constructed monument has been built at the Geier Ranch to commemorate the heroic ride of John (Portugee) Phillips.

Adjacent to old Fort Philip Kearny is the townsite of Kearney, a very pleasant little country town on Highway No. 87. Dude-ranch accommodations are available and a shady park on the banks of Big Piney Creek, awaits at all times, those who wish to camp and fish.

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THE SIBLEY SCOUT

(Continued from page 11)

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TONGUE RIVER INDIAN FIGHT

(Continued from page 15)

mated 35 Indians killed. Seven women and 11 children were captured. He reported one Omaha scout killed, and Lt. Jewett of the 1st Battalion, Nevada Cavalry, and six enlisted men wounded.

* * *

The site of the fight is now a wooded state park along the Tongue River, equipped with picnic tables, about a mile south of Ranchester, Wyo. A small monument recalls Gen. Connor's victory of 1865.*

Not much more was accomplished by the expedition, but certainly the story shows that its lack of success was due to no want of energy or courage in its commanding general.

*Editor's note—A fine granite pyramid was erected in the Connor Battlefield State Park by the Historical Landmark Commission of Wyoming in 1936. It was dedicated on August 16, 1940.

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